No. 51. Abraham offering Isaac.

Genesis 22d, 2d Verse.

Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

It is observed, with extreme propriety, by the great Apostle, that "the holy Scriptures are profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruc= "tion in righteousness." That they abound with the most pleasing and instructive relations; with the justest precepts and most useful observations; that whatever can afford us entertainment, or supply us with in=formation, may be found in the sacred pages, the slightest perusal of them will abundantly convince us. Than this singular command of God to Abram in my text, there is scarce any part which so raises our astonishment, quickens our sensibility, and interests our feelings. I will therefore beg your attention whilst I elucidate the transaction, in which I shall

offer such observations as the subject seems to suggest.

When the Lord had been communing with Abram, promising him support and protection, "God "brought him forth abroad and said, look now toward "Heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number "them. And God said unto him; so shall thy "seed be." At which time, Abram it appears, was upwards of eighty years old, (Chap. 16th, Verse 16th) and as yet he had no child. "And when Abram "was fourscore and six years old, Hagar, Sa"rai's maid, bare Ishmael to Abram. And again "the Lord appeared to Abram, when Abram was "ninety years old and nine," to renew His covenant with him; and, as an intimation of His intention, God commands that he shall no more be called Abram, high or mighty, but Abraham, the father of many nations; and He said, "I will give unto thee, and "unto thy seed after thee, all the land of Canaan "for an everlasting possession, and I will be their "God. And God said unto Abraham, as for Sa-

"rai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai,
"but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless
"her, and give thee a son also of her; and thou
"shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish
"my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant,
"and with his seed after him. And as for Ish-
"mael too, I have heard thee. But my covenant
"will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear.
"And it came to pass after these things"——after Isaac was born and arrived at manhood, at twenty-five, or, as others think, thirty-three years of age——"God said unto Abraham, Take now thy son," &c.

He had hitherto obeyed the voice of the Almighty, but he is now called to give an illustrious proof of his victorious faith and implicit obedience. His only son Isaac which his wife had so unexpectedly born——in whom God had promised that all the families of the earth should be blessed——this very son must Abraham offer unto God for a burnt-offering. When he received the command he did not presume to expostulate

with God, as he had been permitted to do on other occasions, (15th, 2d) but, "he arose early in the morning, clave the wood for the burnt-offering, took Isaac "his son, the intended victim, with two of his young "men, and went unto the place, of which God had "told him."

It is in acts of virtue, as it is of sin——the more deliberately a sin is committed, the greater is the guilt; whereas what is done in the heat of passion, has sometimes a claim to an excuse.

So also in acts of virtue——the more deliberately they are done, the more illustrious they are, and the greater praise is due to them.

And therefore that Abraham's obedience might be complete, God appointed three days space betwixt this hard command and its dreadful execution. "Had "our souls been in Abraham's soul's stead," then only could we conceive the distracting thoughts that must have rent his mind from the moment he set out from his own house, till he came to the mountain in the

land of Moriah. He could not look upon his son, his only child, but his fancy must paint him bleeding on the altar.

Methinks I see the venerable Patriarch pursuing his journey with chearfulness in his looks, but sorrow in his heart. I think I see him meditating on the singular, but awful command, not doubting but that God would raise Isaac in a figure, yet unable to reconcile the severity of the injunction with the delight of the promise. Whilst he is alternately alarmed with apprehension and soothed with hope, distracted with despair and invigorated by faith, let us observe the sentiments which he would revolve in his mind.

'From the rest of my fellow creatures has the 'great God of heaven and earth signally distinguished 'me. He reveals His promises and His com'mands by a way too remarkable to be mistaken. 'He showers upon me blessings which could be con'ferred only by His power, and dispensed by His 'goodness. He graciously promised to give me a

'country, to make of me a great nation, to bless me, to
'make my name great, and to make all the families
'of the earth through me blessed. These blessings He
'continues, as seems good to His wisdom, severally
'to dispense. When He had enriched me with great
'riches, He then, after four several promises, gave
'me a son to inherit them. And now that I am
'looking forward to a posterity, no more to be num-
'bered than the dust of the earth, or the stars of heaven,
'He commands me to take my son, my only son,
'Isaac, the child of my old age, my son so often
'promised, so much desired, so long expected, and at
'last with earnest prayers obtained, and to offer him
'up for a burnt-offering. Severe injunction! hard
'command! Would it not be sufficient that I should
'lose my son by the course of nature, but I myself
'must be the executioner? Must a father plunge the
'fatal knife into the bosom of a son, whom, from his
'birth to this anxious moment, he watched over with
'paternal care, and instructed with paternal diligence?

'a son, who, as his name imports, has filled our 'mouths with laughter, and our tongues with joy— 'a son who, by his dutiful obedience and promising 'expectations, has amply repaid my labor, and libe- 'rally rewarded my solicitude. But the Lord gave, 'and the Lord takes away. From the bountiful hand 'of God I received my son, and to His unerring 'wisdom I will restore him!'

Such may we suppose to be the conflict which raged in Abraham's bosom! But a sense of God's power—a reliance on His promises—and a trust in His goodness suppressed the feelings, the tender feelings of parental affection. Waxing strong in faith, he forgets the cruelty of the act, having regard only to the authority of the command.

When the Patriarch with his son Isaac and his servants had travelled three days, "he lifted up his "eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham "said unto his young men, abide ye here with the ass, "and I and the lad will go yonder and worship,

" and come again to you. And Abraham took the
" wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac
" his son." As they were ascending the mountain,
Isaac, observing the preparations made for a sacrifice,
" the fire and the wood"—innocently asks—" where
" is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Abraham, thou
father of the faithful, a sword pierced through thine
own bowels could not have wounded thee with more ex-
quisite sharpness than this natural question—" where
" is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Faith invigorated
thy actions, and inspiration directed thy words—" my
" son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-
" offering." The catastrophe is now approaching,
the scene is to be soon closed. When they came to the
place God had told him of, " Abraham built an al-
" tar and laid the wood in order—after which he
" bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar
" upon the wood" Where is the Father—need I say
blessed with an only child? who would have had cool-
ness to have built the altar—recollection to have laid

the wood in order—firmness to have bound his son, and laid him on the altar on the wood—and resolution to have stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay this son? Ye who are fathers, whose delight is in the children of your affections—who have watched over them from the cradle—tended them in their infancy, instructed them in their youth—and are now rejoicing in the prospect of reaping the harvest of your labors in their approaching welfare and felicity—could ye, though God himself gave the command—could ye, like Abraham, stretch forth your hand to slay your son? The moment in which he was about to accomplish his intended purpose, having proved his entire obedience to the command of God—"the angel of the Lord called "out of heaven," and congratulated him with the approbation of the Almighty—"lay not thine hand "upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, "for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou "hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

The mourning of Abraham is turned into joy.

Isaac, whom he considered as dead, "is restored safe "and sound." Isaac lives, lives to God, to his joyful parents, lives to be the father of a numerous issue. He lives even to us, to teach us an example of faith and obedience, and he exhibits to us, and to the latest posterity, the goodness of God through his wonderful deliverance.

Hence we see how God suffers his servants, as a trial of their reliance on, and obedience to Him, "to be brought into so great trouble as to go mourning "all the day long;" and how, "when the great water "floods of affliction are ready to drown us, He makes "a way for us to escape."

Hence we see how conspicuous is his goodness to the sons of men! He afflicts us to bring us to Himself. He brings us low that we may see whence our deliverance comes, and "that our help standeth only "in the name of the Lord." He "stablishes us with "His free Spirit," and then withdraws His Spirit from us. God grant us to answer his gracious in-

tention, by mourning for His departure and longing for his presence!

I shall conclude this discourse by shewing wherein Isaac was a type or representative of Christ. For this history in the Old Testament was but a shadow to the substance in the New.

(1) In his birth Isaac was a type of Christ: he was miraculously born beyond the course of nature, Abraham being an hundred, and Sarah ninety years old. Abraham, says the Apostle, "against hope" of having any posterity, "believed in hope that he should "be the father of many nations." Such likewise was the birth of our adorable Redeemer; "that stone cut "out without hands;" (Dan. 2, 34) being born of a pure virgin; who, when the Angel related to her the wonderful tydings, replied, with all the expressions of amazement—"how can this be, seeing I "know not a man!"

As Isaac was his father's heir by birth-right, yet Abraham was without possessions to leave for his

son's inheritance; he was a sojourner wandering about with his flocks and herds, and "having here no con=
"tinuing city:" even so the Son of God, tho' He was Lord of all, yet when He left the bosom of His Father, uttered, with justice, this pathetic complaint, "the foxes
"have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the
"son of man hath not where to lay His head." And "tho' it pleased the Father that, in His Son,
"should all fulness dwell, yet for our sakes He be=
"came poor, that we, through His poverty, might
"be rich."

(2) As Isaac was a type of Christ in his birth, so also in his life. Isaac was circumcised the eighth day; the blessed Jesus on the eighth day submitted to the rite of circumcision.

(3) We perceive Isaac no less a type of Christ in his birth and life, than in his offering up and sufferings.

Abraham, in obedience to God, offered up his son Isaac. God the Father offered up His only begotten son Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind.

Isaac carried the wood for a burnt-offering to Mount Moriah. "He who did no sin" bore His cross to Mount Calvary. And to add to the weight, "He himself bore our sins in His own body on "the tree."

When Isaac was to be offered up, he was accompanied only by his father: even so the Lord Jesus, when He suffered on the cross, "tho' all forsook Him "and fled, yet He was not alone, because His Fa-"ther was with Him. Ye shall be scattered," says He to his disciples, "every man to his own, and shall "leave me alone, yet I am not alone, because the Fa-"ther is with me."

Did Isaac, when he came to be offered, dutifully submit himself to the will of his aged Father? so "went the Lord Jesus like an innocent lamb to the "slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, "so He opened not His mouth."

Abraham offered his only son Isaac for a burnt-offering upon Mount Moriah: God delivered His

only begotten Son to be crucified, about two thousand years after, in the same place, called then Mount Calvary.

Abraham and Isaac travelled three days journey to the mountain to which God would direct them: the Blessed Jesus remained three days in the grave, and rose again on the third day from the dead.

(4) I have only to pursue the parallel in Isaac's escape and wonderful deliverance.

When Abraham stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay his son, then did the Angel of the Covenant step in and stay his hand. The soldiers, when they came and brake the legs of the two malefactors that were with him, finding the Holy Jesus dead already, they brake not His legs; that He might be the true Paschal Lamb; and that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "a bone of Him shall not be broken."

As Isaac was never slain, but a Ram caught in a thicket ready prepared for sacrifice and offered in his stead—so our Saviour's Divinity never suffered, tho' He was crucified and slain.

The Ram was offered in sacrifice for the saving of Isaac; God Almighty, for our escape and deliverance, and to satisfy His justice, provided a sacrifice to make an atonement for us, even Jesus Christ, that immaculate Lamb, "who was slain to take away the "sins of the world. For we all like sheep had gone "astray; we had turned every one to his own way, "and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Isaac, ready to have been offered up as a sacrifice, was miraculously delivered and joyfully restored to his father——even so was Christ crucified, and rose again from the dead, and triumphantly ascended into Heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us. And as Abraham rejoiced at Isaac's deliverance, even so should we rejoice with holy rejoicing, that "Christ "died for our sins, and rose again for our justification."

In a word, as from Isaac, who was as good as dead, sprang as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand upon the sea shore innumerable——amongst which the great blessings of the Mes-

siah, who also was reckoned as good as dead—being crucified—a stone laid on the mouth of His sepulchre, a seal set upon it, and a watch to keep it; yet by Him and through Him has arisen an innumerable company of Christian believers, who will celebrate His praises to all eternity.

'We offer unto Thee, O Lord, our most devout 'supplications that we may all be of the joyful num- 'ber. When the day approaches in which Thou wilt 'render to every man according to his works, then, O 'Lord, let our sins be washed out in His most pre- 'cious blood. Thou Lamb of God, Son of the Father, 'that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy 'upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the 'world, in that awful day, have mercy upon us. 'Thou that takest away the sins of the world, grant 'us the remission of our sins, and all other benefits 'of Thy passion!'

Theoph^{s}. J. St. John.

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